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Retained EU Law Bill threatens economic value of UK seas

As the Retained EU Law Bill (REUL) makes its way through the House of Lords this week, the implications on policies ranging from employment to the environment are being uncovered.

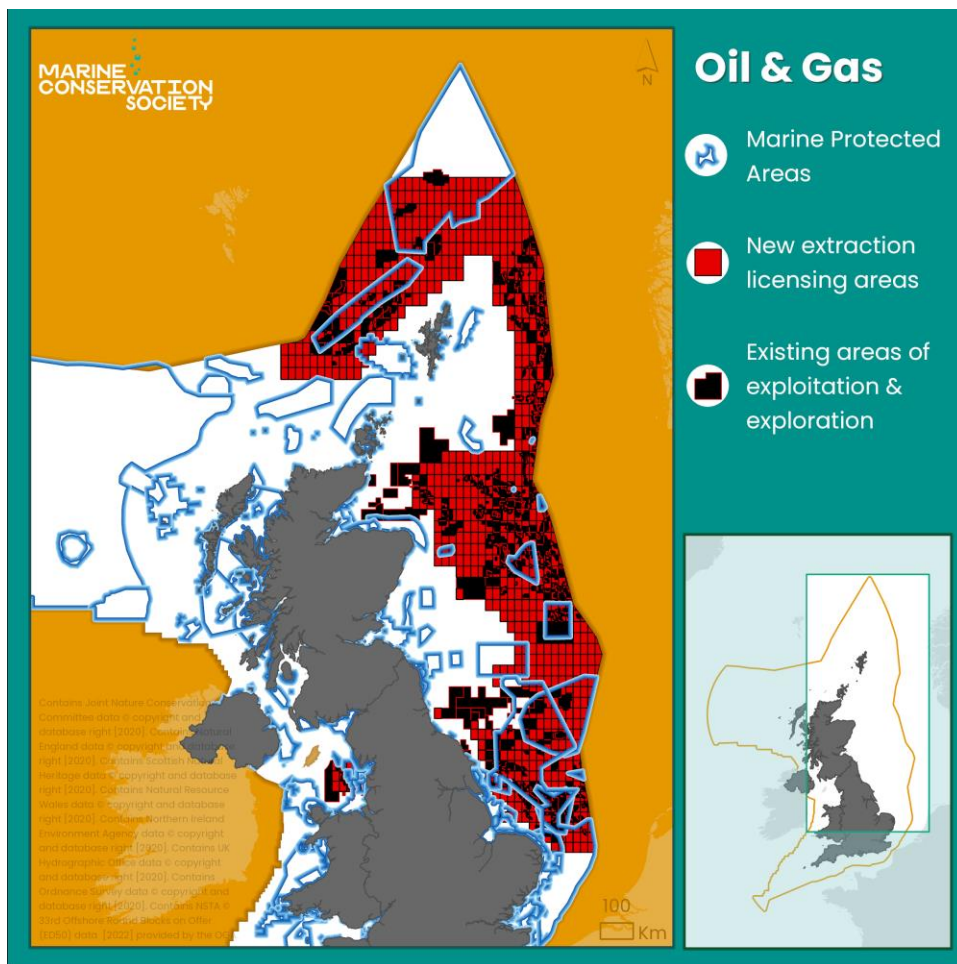
The [Marine Conservation Society](#) has reviewed the likely impacts of the REUL Bill on our seas, analysing impacts to the UK's marine natural capital and Marine Protected Area safeguards. Key laws that provide long-standing marine protection and currently safeguard the marine environment could be removed or weakened if the Bill is passed.

Sandy Luk (she/her), Chief Executive at the Marine Conservation Society, said: "The UK's seas provide huge value to the UK economy. A value that is at risk if the REUL Bill is passed. From habitats and species protections, fisheries management, marine and freshwater water quality, marine impact assessments and chemicals regulations, the REUL Bill poses a threat to the health of our seas, and all of the life within it."

Marine Protected Areas support billions of pounds of economic value by enhancing biodiversity, protecting carbon stores, and supporting marine recreation and tourism. Carbon storage of coastal habitats and sediments has an estimated value of at least £57.5 billion, but potentially significantly more.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) safeguard the UK's key marine habitats and species, from offshore reefs to coastal marshes and wetlands. Most of the laws currently protecting these areas are under threat through the Retained EU Law Bill. The compulsory assessments that are currently the law, could be scrapped or weakened. This would allow oil, gas and offshore wind developments to go ahead in a way that could seriously undermine the role of MPAs in climate change mitigation and protecting biodiversity.

There is already a significant overlap of proposed oil and gas developments with the MPA network.



There are numerous threats that these developments pose to the marine environment including disturbance and injury to marine species caused by underwater seismic surveys, increased risk of operational and accidental oil and gas releases, and disturbance to the seabed leading to loss of essential habitat and releases of long-term carbon stores.

The Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt (Nature Conservation MPA) is one of the largest MPAs that could be under threat if the REUL Bill passes. This Scottish MPA, (size: 5,278km²) designated for its unique habitat due to its geology and deep-sea sponge aggregations, is home to one of the longest-living and slowest growing marine bivalves, the Ocean Quahog - some of which have been found to live to over 100 years old.

Similarly to oil and gas developments, if the REUL Bill passes and offshore wind developments are not appropriately assessed marine mammals, such as whales, dolphins and harbour porpoises, could come under threat through noise pollution, or entanglement in ghost gear caught on anchoring cables, and sensitive seabed habitats damaged, particularly near to our coasts.

The Office for National Statistics **values UK marine natural capital at £211 billion**. However, this is likely to be significantly underestimated due to limitations of available data. From Marine Protected Areas enhancing biodiversity and coastal ecosystems providing natural defences, to fisheries and aquaculture industries providing revenue and jobs, the UK's blue spaces are likely to deliver far more in marine natural capital than first estimated.

Coastal ecosystems such as saltmarsh habitats provide savings to the UK economy

estimated to be up to £33.2 billion per year – by providing natural defence against coastal flooding and erosion. Removing protection of these habitats could lead to much higher costs of flood defences in the future and increase flood risk to properties and infrastructure worth billions of pounds more. A healthy coastal environment is essential for coastal economies that have a value of approximately £17 billion. Loss of water quality through waste mismanagement, chemical pollution and nutrient loading, which are all increased possibilities from the REUL Bill, would erode this value.

The Marine Conservation Society is calling for the REUL Bill to be immediately scrapped to preserve and protect our seas.

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Notes to editors

Laws that could be affected include the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Bathing Water Regulations 2013, and REACH regulations.

To safeguard the socioeconomic value of our marine environment, the Marine Conservation Society supports [Wildlife and Countryside Link and Greener UK](#)'s calls.

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Images

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